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ABSTRACT

Recent analyses of the linkages between policy analysis and politics suggests that contemporary focus on the first had been poorly attenuated to the theoretical needs of the second. This paper specifies the kinds of research in educational politics that should ensue if the politics-of-education field is to become less oriented to specific policies or to a singular paradigm. The larger conceptual framework rests in the understanding of "political" as encompassing a broad range of factors within the political system that shape or influence its activities. The framework suggests a set of categories of political analysis that is drawn from the relevant subfields of political science. The paper highlights the following subfields' applications to education and their research possibilities: political learning, the media and school politics, electoral studies (political behavior), policies and policy communities, courts and the law, and comparative education. Two tables are included. (Contains 45 notes.) (LMI)

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UNEXPLORED DIMENSIONS OF 'POLITICAL' IN THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION FIELD

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Recent analyses of the linkages between policy analysis on the one hand, and politics on the other, suggests that contemporary focus on the first had been poorly attenuated to the theoretical needs of the second.[1] This paper is an effort to specify the kinds of research in educational politics that should ensue if the politics of education field is to become less oriented to specific policies or to a singular paradigm. In short, the paper suggests a much richer variety of research within a theoretical framework that scholars might well undertake if this field is to stress politics research per se more than it has in the past.

The larger conceptual framework of the paper rests in the understanding of "political" as encompassing a broad range of factors within the political system that shape or influence its activities. Both governmental and private sector factors operate, as do institutional and cognitive structures of social life. That framework suggests a set of categories of political analysis that is drawn from the relevant sub-fields of political science. These categories are neglected in recent research and should receive higher priority.

Political Learning

Students of democracy have always been interested in the way in which citizens learn the roles that they are called upon to carry out. This political learning, or socialization, arises

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from research in cognitive psychology (as with Piaget) that asserts the young learn little about a topic until they reach an age of being open to that topic. Adults carry on in later life those learning influences that arising from their earlier learning.

Relevance in Non-Educational Fields

From the earliest classical studies of Greek philosophers seeking to inculcate proper values and behavior in the young, political scientists have focused on political role learning. They have gone through periods of a new awareness, an intensive research phase in the 1960's, and a sudden loss of interest. In the 1920's, a team studied how such learning among the young existed in a number of major nations, including the US.[2] Interest was renewed after World War II, as University of Michigan scholars developed constructs of how such learning took place and how it continued into adult life.[3] In the 1960's, research funds provided detailed studies through polls of the changes in perceptions of the young not only in the US but also comparatively.[4] But after that surge, new ideas were limited, as if most believed they had learned all there was to learn; little has been done in recent decades. What do scholars believe that they have learned?

The Young Don't Know Politics

The finding of limited political awareness among the young fits nicely into Piagetian theories of specific periods in development when certain ideas are "ready" to be accepted. For politics, it is in the early teen years, when awareness is said to reach out from the local and immediate to the larger area of social life, where ideas appear about the political world or candidates.[5]

What the Young Learn Comes from Local Influences

Beneath this indifference of the youngest, however, many children demonstrate later some vague percept of political life that shape their voting behavior and party identifications.[6] That finding is traceable to the influence of the family, paralleled by those of peer and neighborhood. All these influences are tightly reinforced in a common belief and perception that creates a world of cues that shape young cognitions. Of key importance here is the finding that schools do little to influence such potential political cognitions. That is possibly because the curriculum provides little early structured political learning other than creating symbolic support for the political system--flags, pledge of allegiance, and so on.

In Adult Life, Those Early Influences are Sustained

In developmental terms, the roots laid early develop fully in later life. Thus, correlations of adult behavior such as party identification or voting frequency are linked to those of their parents. Incidentally, party identification has a longer life than earlier learned religious values. Consequently, national political campaigns become efforts to recruit the party faithful, leaving a small proportion of independents (maybe one-quarter) who also can be solicited by national candidates.

Research Possibilities on Political Learning

Since the mid-1970's politics of education scholars rarely study this field, often leaving it to a few others who link curriculum to political learning.[7] Consequently, there is a large opening for scholars who might explore the cognitive aspects of how political learning among the young and adults is influenced by schools. Collaboration with cognitive psychologists would illuminate such research.

Do Children Lack Political Understanding?

Earlier studies of children relied on data drawn from paper-and-pencil tests to gauge political understanding.[8] This method, however, means that findings are often narrow concerning political perceptions. There are other research options using qualitative or small-group studies of what the youngest understand about politics. Moreover, new effort requires understanding not simply voting and party attitudes, but the young's grasp of what "the political" is and how it applies--even to matters close to them. For example, Wirt interviewed first-graders to understand three models of political decision making. From their own experiences, first graders understood the political models quite well and could apply them to test cases.

The Early Teen Years' Growing Awareness

In a world so saturated by media exposure, and increasingly by computer linkages, to a larger world, what are the political messages that children detect and their reactions to them? This approach refers not simply to understanding children's grasp of political personages, but also of political events, like gangs, wars, assassination, scandals, and so on. Is the dysfunctional image of society often found among teenagers, reflected in their view of political parties, voting, interest groups and other political understandings. Moreover, how does the schools' civic curriculum reinforce or alter those perceptions, often gained from the media?[9] Here again, polls plus small-group studies could make possible understanding these cognitive images by relying less on structured questions.

The Adult Reaction to Change

What are the future conditions in adult life that may alter children's cognitions about politics? This does not mean understanding how adults change their party affiliation or

choose not to vote. Rather it is to understand how political learning as children affect adult perceptions and voting about school matters. Also, there needs to be more research effort linking adults' evaluation of their own schooling and their views to their views about schools, or school policy today. If an adult is satisfied with their own schooling, but is unhappy about schools today, what factors created that attitudinal change? Or does an earlier unhappiness translate into later unhappiness about schools?

The Media and School Politics

Until recently, the political impact of media communication was little studied in political science. Primarily, media have been seen as something that politicians manipulated for their own ends. But in recent decades, political scientists believe that the media basically alters the nature of the democratic process, particularly in elections and policy making. What is striking is the absence of research within politics of education concerning media impact upon school politics, even though school administrators know the political problems that media occasion.

Studies Outside Education

Political studies of the media have centered around the classic research questions of Harold Lassell, "Who says what to whom with what effect?" That is, focus is on the institution of the media, on media content, on audiences, and on their effects. Journalists--electronic or print--summarize, refine and alter what they learn in order to make it suitable for their audiences to listen or read--and do so for a profit. But the content of that function has consequences for the values and interests of audience groups who respond to messages.

Studies demonstrate that there is a concentrated ownership and control of the media, print or electronic.[10] Other studies focus on the political orientation of media employees (often criticized as liberal), or on how they translate news in a general way (often viewing politics as a "horse race" or essentially conflict based).[11] Government operations are thus the source of great attention, but much of it is seen as conflict-oriented. That relationship of media and government is increasingly very close, and increasingly less neutral.[12] [13] In effect, media sources take on a political orientation in which neutrality or "objectivity" is a norm rarely followed.

The influence of the media on others, and others on it, have been given much attention in political science--but very little of this is locally-oriented. Media effects on politics is seen in voting studies. Television coverage is a main source of information on choices for the presidency, along with party identification. But much media trivializes policy, and is oriented to viewing government as arenas of conflicting interests. As increasingly "negative" campaigning via television dominates electoral campaigns at all levels, the result is to filter the level of contact between voter and candidate through media.

The media have impact on school government, which is after all an audience. Research suggests that the media influence is most often in generating clues about the policy environment, which makes the media one of those helping to set agenda of government. But governments also has its effects on the media. It may "manage" the news to shape media coverage and hence public views, but the linkage is complex and often confused.[14] The First Amendment protects the media against government censorship, but some regulation through the Federal Communications Commission affects the use of wave lengths

and sometimes media content.

Surrounding all these factors has been the increasing concern for the media's responsibility in a democracy. Maybe of more importance is the problem that triviality and conflict overwhelms media coverage.

Research Possibility for Politics of Education

So very little has been done with the media in politics of education research that the field is wide open to research possibilities.

Elite Use of Media

As school elites (e.g., school professionals, interest groups) seek to construct a "policy stream" supportive of their ideas, they will use media to shape opinion. The study of interest groups in school policy-making has dealt very little with the media, whether local, state, or national. But what is the relationship between elites and media in shaping the decisional process concerning school matters?

The Media Role in School Politics

In the swamp of data about school performance or reform, how do the media decide which data are useful to transmit to the public. In particular, what is the role of the Education Writers Association, and what is the quality of education reporting among newspaper journalists? How does career turnover of journalists affect the conduct of their school reporting? We don't even know how much knowledge of schools media reports have. More broadly, what is the relationship between the reporters--print or electronic--and the owners of the media? Are there different agendas about school matters, and if so, what are they?

Most voters get their information about schools from TV and radio. Electronic media feature school discipline, gangs, dress codes, violence, and drugs. Other electronic stories focus heavily on conflict like teacher strikes or superintendent turnover in core cities. Peripheral issues like home schooling and computer access also are prominent. This electronic coverage might explain why school discipline is at the top of the public concerns in the annual Gallup poll, and low academic standards engender less public concern. But politics of education research on the content and political impact of electronic media is nonexistent.

The Media Audience

What sources of information about schools do parents have, what criteria do they employ to judge that information, and what conditions sensitize them to school news? We must not assume that the audience is homogenous. Much of its answers will be differentiated by their education, status, and possibly even gender and race. But no one has given thought among politics of education specialists to formalizing theories about differing interaction of media and audience.

The Normative Structure of the Media and Schools

These empirical questions carry normative concerns which merit research. In translating information to the public, what are the expectations about school reporting required by both their own profession and by their responsibility to the public? Does the debate over "neutrality" occur, and what dangers arise if a more partisan approach is taken by media journalists and owners?

Research collaboration of politics of education scholars with colleagues in journalism

schools would be quite fruitful. Survey data would be especially illuminating about answers to such questions as: Is the rapid spread of policies across states and localities (a policy epidemic) in large or small part caused or aided by media coverage?

Electoral Politics

The field of electoral studies (often termed "political behavior) focuses strongly on the attitudes and behaviors of voters and nonvoters, as they select or reject government decision makers.[15] That field is distinct from studying political institutions like political parties or pressure groups that link citizens to the elected.

Studies Outside Education

To understand this research focus, political science has focused on the attitudes and activities of citizens within the political system. Frequent elections provide a large data source for scholars. Research money has been substantial, and creates research institutions like the University of Michigan's electoral archive. NSF research grants train new scholars to use the increasingly sophisticated models and quantitative analyses of political behavior. The findings from voluminous research of electoral behavior are so numerous that only a few can be treated here.

The lack of Citizen Relevance to Elections

From the earliest research of polls and participation in national elections, one finding prevails. Fewer citizens care to vote over the past five decades. From presidential elections down the ticket to school government, smaller percentages turn out.

The More-More Principle of Participation

A second major finding has been that while all citizens are equal, in the words of George

Orwell, "Some are more equal than others." That is, the higher the socioeconomic scale, the more citizens participate in our democracy, whether by voting or other means. The obverse is also found--the farther down the socioeconomic scale, the less the participation.[16] That is, those with more resources in society participate more in the political system, and they seemingly get more rewards that then causes them to participate even more, and so on. For those with less resources the opposite process takes place.

Only A Few Use Many Forms

Participation means not simply the act of voting, but can also involve other activities like working in an organization with local policy emphasis, persuading others to vote, campaigning, contacting local, state, or national government officials, attending political rallies, giving money in campaigns, and so on. But the key point is that few participate in most of these activities; one-half do none of them, another one-quarter does only one (mostly voting in a presidential election), and only one percent does as many as six.[17] In the 1994 California election, only 26% of the adults voted because many were not registered.

Research Possibilities for Politics of Education

Research concerning the electoral connection in the politics of education field terminated abruptly. In the 1960's, the necessity to garner voters to support school bonds and tax levies gave rise to a brief politics of education literature that focused primarily on keeping the voter turnout low. Most voters in very low turnout local school finance elections supported more school spending.[18] After 1968 a large number of negative voters appeared, leading to the failure of most school finance referenda.

Rarely is this electoral connection, reflecting a new theory of voter dissatisfaction, studied in order to explain behavior. Indeed, no scholar has updated school referenda studies since Piele and Halls in 1973 and Hamilton and Cohen in 1974.[19]

Linkage of Voting and Non-Voting for Schools

In the current challenge era, relatively few have studied why voters participate or not in school elections. In particular, what is the relevance of the act of voting itself to citizens' sense of involvement in democracy? What attitudes shape their perception of schools and their motivations in life? As to school board elections, how do citizens perceive the relevance of voting, the presence of elections, and their dissatisfaction or satisfaction? From the perspective of local policy makers, how do they perceive citizens in planning for elections and what strategies do they derive--successful or not?

The Social Bases of Participation

It is also the case that individual voting participation is positively linked to socio-economic status, particularly to educational attainment. More importantly, how do those at different SES levels perceive the electoral connection--what do they hope for from it and what evidence is there of this hope? What factors in social life like high income or church attendance help political participation? Research can create complex theories of democratic participation involving school influence, but there is no active cadre of scholars doing this work.

The Multiple Acts of Participation

The variety of kinds of democratic participation in schools has been little studied. But there is a useful cross-linkage of such studies from political science to schools.[20] Specifically, other

than voting, how do citizens participate in linking themselves to school policies? Or to board actions? On the one hand, there is the elite connection to study, those small numbers who regularly attend board meetings or vote in referenda. On the other, there is the large number who do neither. But what other kinds of participation take place, particularly those that boards and professionals perceive as designed to influence them?

These research possibilities necessitates new kinds of data collection. These could range from the community sample used in earlier research both before and after a referendum or board election. Others could explore and re-analyze the Gallup poll data appearing annually in *Phi Delta Kappan*. Explorations of small-group interviews at stages of an election provide another--and most unusual--source of data. This approach would draw from qualitative studies in phenomenology to determine and analyze personal motivations concerning political behavior.

Politics and Policy Communities

Definition

Most recent research in intergovernmental relations approaches the topic in terms of the interactions among levels and their impact on the classroom.[21] This type of analysis needs to be supplemented by a different intergovernmental perspective that uses concepts like "policy community." Walker[22] (1981) provides an overview of this evolving notion of policy community.

> People working in America on policy problems . . . have enough regular contact or interaction to be regarded as members of a community or organized social system, even though they may work in hundreds of agencies spread over the country. Communities of policy experts . . . include those primarily engaged in studying the policies and procedures being employed in an area, as well as administrators of the major agencies with operating programs. The communities involve bureau chiefs and officials in operating agencies with

academics and consultants employed by research and development firms, publishers and editors or professional journals and magazines, representatives from business firms that are major supplies or goods and services employed in the area, members of legislative staffs and legislators themselves who specialize in the subject, and other elected officials with interest in the policies.

It is important to note that not all community members will be involved in policymaking directly. Rather, the policy community is a constellation of intellectual ideas and social understandings that influence the policy choices of decision-makers within its domain. The concept of policy community implies that individuals within a community share internal norms, values, frameworks of communication, and may engage in concerted political activities. Policy community is a broader concept than a policy issue network that focuses upon a particular policy at a specific level of government.[23] For example, the spread of state school finance reform in the 1970's was orchestrated by a network led by the Ford Foundation.[24] These issue networks rely more for impact upon a central guidance mechanism (like Ford or the Institute for Creation Science) than do policy communities.

Relevance of Work in Other Fields

Political science has explored the policy communities through such issues as 1) how does the commonality of policy community member develop, 2) how is this communality sustained and possibly transformed, 3) what impact do policy communities have upon paradigm shifts that undergird policy solutions, and 4) what policies are enacted, implemented, and influenced by policy communities.[25]

An important variable of success in influencing policy through a community is coherence among members policy views.[26] Policy communities learn and change their views about appropriate policy solutions and develop new policy paradigms.

Asking 'how' a policy means is asking how a policy accrues meaning; where meanings reside; how they are transmitted to and among various policy stakeholders; how they come to be shared or not shared; how they may be destroyed . . . In suggesting that a legitimate role for policy and implementation analysis is a focus on how meanings are communicated successfully or not, I am also suggesting that the net of stakeholders needs to be more widely cast than is traditionally suggested. Not only are we interested in the actions of traditional implementors . . . but also in non-participant observers of the policy issue: members of the greater public who have an interest in the issue and who are involved in the creation and sharing of policy meaning. While not standing to gain materially from the success of the policy, they are a part of a policy process that is also about the expression and validation of values . . .[27]

Political scientists have examined the path from ideas embraced by a policy community to policy outcomes.[28] But these analyses are partial, preliminary, and do not focus on education policy. The concept of policy community can be linked to concepts like "powerful ideas."[29] A recent powerful idea shared by an education reform policy community concerns the linkage between better education and successful U.S. international economic competition.

Application to Education

Mazzoni[30] provides some insights on policy communities in recent state education reform that emphasized state subject matter standards and other policy changes. He mentions such nationwide groups as:

1) State political leaders - Education Commission of States, National Conference of State Legislatures, Chief State School Officers, and National Governors Association that became a major player.

2) Big Business - Business Roundtable, National Alliance of Business, National Association of Manufacturers, and U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

3) Subject Matter Associations - National Council of Teachers of Mathematics,

National Science Teachers Association and many others.

4) Teacher Organizations - AFT, NEA.

5) Policy analysts - Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, Center for Policy Research in Education. These organizations "publicized reports, convened meetings, sponsored research, cultivated personal relationships, and lobbied state lawmakers."[31]

There are many other organizations and groups active in state education reform at the national and state level. There is a group of opponents that opposed outcome based education. Many parts of the supportive coalition, such as business, are extremely fragmented, and can be neutralized by opponents including Citizens for Excellence in Education, the Christian Coalition, and the Eagle Forum. These organizations are part of another policy community that uses the Heritage Foundation for policy analyses and advocacy.

In sum, the concept of policy communities within education policy needs more definition, and research concerning operation and impact. Traditional interest group research cannot encompass the boundaries of a policy community. A major research question is how policy communities influence fit with pluralism or other political science theories.

Courts and Law

Courts as policy makers, law as reflection of politically dominant values, and judges as agents transmitting views of what that law looks like--all constitute crucial unresearched areas in the politics of education. In recent decades, courts have affected schooling policy making greatly. Political science has a long tradition of constitutional analysis supplemented

in recent decades by analysis or judicial behavior and institutions. Again, though, politics of education has done almost nothing about courts, even though school people are everywhere facing a storm of legal change.

Studies Outside Education

Analysis of courts and law have had long roots in legal and political science scholarship because the Constitution provides broad parameters for the use of power in the thousands of American governments.[32] Over time, that emphasis on legal analysis has altered in response to new theories about the behavior of judges, the goals of law, and the means of achieving them. Starting in the 1950's, however, political science judicial voting patterns, and the causes of judges' decisions. This approach conceptualized court behavior as part of the total political system.[33] More recently research has focused on courts' interactions with other agencies[34] or with public opinion. Consequently, the study of courts, justice, and the law has moved well beyond constitutional interpretation into institutions, roles, and post-decision consequences of the judiciary.

A current survey of research demonstrates a wide variety of research transcending the old tradition of only lawyers doing legal analysis.[35] New concepts involve institution, role, organization and values. Topics include:

-alternatives to formal adjudication

-politics and judicial selection

-contextual influences on judicial decision making

-the personal role of judges in decision making

-the nature and influence of organized litigants, and

–post-decision implementation

New methods of analysis turn from content analysis of court decisions to quantitative analysis of judicial behavior. These studies incorporate new methods of data analysis, running from descriptive statistics to regression analysis.

Certain theoretical orientations guide this judicial behavioral analysis that applies to all levels of government and all policies--like education. For example, theory asserts and evidence supports that:

1. While courts have different rituals and pressures upon them compared to other branches of government, nevertheless, they are a major agency in policy making and implementation. As such, they are "political" agencies of the policy system.[36] Actual decisions by judges operate within allegedly neutral or "objective" rules (imposed by constitution and tradition) that, however, ultimately favors one side in allocating resources and values. As such, courts are part of the political system in this allocative function.

2. The major effort of courts is to arrive at some internal agreement about their actions, whether a consensus in judgment or an agreement to be consonant with decisions over a period of time (*stare decisis*). That effort contributes to the stability of law facing an environment that often calls for change. That stability in turn adds certainty to the lives of citizens and to the operations of social institutions.

3. Among judges, where there is more discretion at state or federal appellate courts, personal values can play more of a role in arriving at decisions. Custom inhibits much freedom, of course, but where it does exist, judges with common values will *vote together* in different blocks in decisions affecting major policy issues.

4. Finally, formal adjudication does not exhaust all methods of conflict resolution. That resolution may be achieved through informal mediation or arbitration by family heads or church leaders, or by informal courts within a social organization. Such practices involve use of third parties to deal with contending parties, providing decisions that lead to peaceful resolution.

In short, research portrays courts as:

--basically political in its conflict resolution task,

--claimants seeking state legitimacy over such conflicts and

--judges varying in decisions about constitution and statute that are linked to social context, values, and partisanship.

While judges are constrained by the institution, these are infused by personal values of society, party, and philosophy. The interaction of institution and person provides a rich analysis of these authorities in black robes.

Research Possibilities for Politics of Education

Few scholars in the politics of education field actually study adjudication, the use of law, and judicial behavior. They seem to avoid this legal context of politics, maybe because they think they need legal degrees to do judicial analysis. However, lack of legal training has not stopped political scientists or authors who explored the role of courts as policy innovators.[37] Note some useful research directions which politics of education scholars might turn:

1. Education Law in the American States. Much of the research on law in politics of education focuses on the origins, implementation, and evaluation of school statutes.

Other legal writing--mostly before the 1980's--focuses primarily upon compilations and analyses of major federal court cases affecting school policy.[38] The latter has high utility for school professionals and boards who need legal advice to wend their way through increasingly complex legal challenges to the school system.

However, across the American states there is no meaningful analysis within the politics of education field that explains political aspects of education law. For example, studies of site-based management refer to a limited review of the states' legal issues. Within each state there does exist a compilation of state law, but content analysis of such law or codes is sparingly employed to determine the values, purposes, and consequences of education law.[39]

2. Judicial Consequences of New Law. Another priority research area is Parallel studies of judicial behavioralism, namely, the role of judges and litigants when they are allocating resources and values for education.

a. *Judicial Behavior.* How are judges at any level influenced by differences in their social background, partisan selection, and philosophy? What are the socio-economic characteristics of state or local judges? What are the role concepts used by judges in their decision making? Finally, among the states, what theory helps explain conflicting decisions in judicial areas like school finance equalization. New Hampshire courts declare their finance system constitutional, but New Jersey judges reach the opposite conclusion.

b. *Court Decisions.* What is the linkage of public opinion to legal decisions on school policy? How do differences in the American states' adjudication systems affect the nature of court decisions? How has a set of legal decisions on a given policy--desegregation,

student discipline, etc.--altered over time with new ideas or evidence? How do judicial decision and administrative implementation interact, especially over time? What alternatives to formal adjudication exist to resolve school conflicts (e.g. mediation, etc.)?

c. *Litigants*. Who uses the courts in conflict over school policy? How do interest groups use the courts as a lobbying process, with particular attention to religious matters? Is there a consistent pattern of litigants as winners and losers arising from judges' decisions? Is there interstate variation in these outcomes?

Comparative Education

Background - Politics of Education scholars have conducted international case studies and comparisons for many years.[40] But most prior research was conceived before policy makers had utilized international comparative analysis of student achievement in subjects such as reading, math, and science. There is a raging debate about the alleged low performance of the United States in math and science, including results from the Second International Math and Science Study.[41] Regardless of how the United States is doing in the international achievement horse race, there is a need to link student attainment with underlying politics. How do influences upon achievement from the politics of education operate in different countries? Do these political differences have much impact on U.S. achievement compared to other nations?

For example, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) includes 40 countries concerning the intended curriculum (government policies), implemented curriculum (taught in class rooms), and attained curriculum (learned by students on a common international test). Some of the key questions are : What curriculum

differences exist between the countries? What is taught and when?; What topics are not covered? The political theory for testing becomes: What do different political patterns have to do with these different national curriculum policies and student assessment results?

Relevance

A major theme of TIMSS is the extremely wide variation among countries in the intended and implemented curriculum.[42] Another study of university entrance exams in math and science in seven countries also stressed variation in curricular format, length, topics covered, difficulty, and the degree to which students were given choices in answering test items.[43] So far, scholarly study of these inter-country differences focuses on whether the United States academic standards are comparatively difficult or easy, and how much time is spent on various topics in the U.S. curriculum compared to other nations. U.S. politics of education research focuses overwhelmingly on the English-speaking countries and other European countries like Belgium, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, while those in the Pacific Basin or Latin America receive less attention.[44]

Possible Research Questions

Research in American politics of education comparative education has focused on who controls education, but not upon the differences that various policymaking structures and processes make in what students study. A strong predictor of whether a student has learned a curricular topic is the opportunity (or its lack) to study a topic in school. This is called opportunity to learn. For example, some countries utilize a central ministry of education and a national exam system to determine what students learn. What is the connection of this centralized policymaking approach to official curriculum objectives or exam content?

Some countries have a much closer policymaking and political influence linkage than the United States between university admissions and secondary school curricula. For example, SAT or ACT versus university syllabi in Hong Kong and France drive secondary school the content. U.S. research on politics has rarely pursued the influence of higher education policies upon lower education curriculum within a comparative perspective. The constant theme of national variation in comparative curriculum studies suggests the need to dissect the political influences that cause and maintain intercountry differences. Recent comparative political analysis by OECD provides some hints.

Table 1 presents a comparison of decisions taken by level of governance as a percentage of all decisions. Note that the United States has an unusually low number of decisions made at the national level. The lack of national standards in the United States may help account for lower curriculum student assessment results compared to some other nations. American local control is in accord with the views of U.S. public opinion, because Table 2 demonstrates that the United States has the highest percent of public opinion compared to other nations favoring local decisions in general, including the amount of time spent teaching each subject, plus how subjects are taught. Our commitment to local control inhibits our ability to politically impose national or state academic curriculum standards as evidenced by the recent Congressional debate concerning Goals 2,000.

These OECD tables provide an initial view of comparative political influences upon international differences in what students study and consequently learn. There is a long tradition of U.S. curriculum politics studies, but this focus needs to be extended to the international achievement arena.[45] Politics of education scholars need to place more

emphasis upon what difference politics makes in terms of what students learn. International comparisons of school-based management, for example, needs to focus more upon the opportunity to learn various curricular content. A centralized curriculum might cause more standardization in what content the teachers cover, especially if this central curriculum is reinforced by high stakes exams. The international arena is an excellent place to expand the foci of our studies. Some U.S. states with high achievement (Minnesota, Iowa) and low achievement (California, Louisiana) could be compared with other nations in terms of their distinctive politics of determining curriculum.

TABLE I

P18: Locus of decision-making

P18 : Niveaux de décision

Table P18:
Decisions taken by level of governance as a percentage of all decisions (public lower secondary education) (1991)

Tableau P18 :
Décisions concernant l'enseignement secondaire public du premier cycle, par niveau administratif (en pourcentage de toutes les décisions) (1991)

In %	Locus of decision-making (1) *Niveaux de décision (1)*					en %
	School level *Niveau établissement*	Intermediate level 1 *Niveau intermédiaire 1*	Intermediate level 2 *Niveau intermédiaire 2*	Country level *Niveau national*	Total	
Austria	44	8	26	23	100	Autriche
Belgium	26	50	24	-	100	Belgique
Denmark	39	48	-	14	100	Danemark
Finland	38	50	-	13	100	Finlande
France	35	-	35	30	100	France
Germany	32	44	17	7	100	Allemagne
Ireland	74	8	-	18	100	Irlande
New Zealand	73	-	-	27	100	Nouvelle-Zélande
Norway	31	45	-	24	100	Norvège
Portugal	42	-	3	55	100	Portugal
Spain	28	26	14	32	100	Espagne
Sweden	47	47	-	6	100	Suède
Switzerland	9	44	46	-	100	Suisse
United States	26	71	3	-	100	Etats-Unis

(1) See technical note V in Annex 3
- This specific decision-making level does not exist

(1) Voir annexe 3, note technique V
- Ce niveau spécifique de décision n'existe pas

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TABLE 2

C27: Decision-making at school level

C27 : Prise de décision au niveau de l'établissement

Table C27:
Percentage of respondents who thought it was "very important" for decisions to be made by schools themselves (1993/94)

Tableau C27 :
Pourcentage des répondants qui estimaient qu'il est "très important" que les décisions soient prises par les établissements scolaires eux-mêmes (1993 94)

	What subjects are taught *Le choix des disciplines enseignées*	How subjects are taught *La manière d'enseigner ces disciplines*	Amount of time spent teaching each subject *Temps consacré à l'enseignement de chaque discipline*	How the school budget is spent *L'utilisation des crédits de l'établissement*	Teacher selection and promotion *Le recrutement et la promotion des enseignants*	Teachers' salaries and working conditions *Le salaire et les conditions de travail des enseignants*	**Items average within each country** **Moyenne des rubriques par pays**	
Austria	31	36	28	33	31	18	**29.6**	*Autriche*
Belgium (Flemish community)	22	41	27	36	39	26	**31.9**	*Belgique (Communauté flamande)*
Denmark	20	32	16	34	31	12	**24.0**	*Danemark*
Finland	18	35	26	40	34	22	**28.9**	*Finlande*
France	34	56	51	50	59	43	**48.7**	*France*
Netherlands	15	35	22	31	47	24	**28.9**	*Pays-Bas*
Portugal	44	55	50	56	51	37	**48.8**	*Portugal*
Spain	13	19	17	19	20	13	**16.9**	*Espagne*
Sweden	23	38	24	51	44	17	**32.8**	*Suède*
Switzerland	18	32	21	22	26	14	**22.0**	*Suisse*
United Kingdom	39	50	44	57	50	32	**45.3**	*Royaume-Uni*
United States	53	60	57	64	67	57	**59.8**	*Etats-Unis*
Country average for each item	**27.7**	**40.6**	**31.8**	**41.0**	**41.6**	**26.2**		***Moyenne des pays pour chaque rubrique***

See Annex 1 for notes

Voir notes en annexe 1

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